

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife  
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*Made Available - by Newman to A. J. Smith  
163 TAKEN IN NATION'S BIGGEST GAME RAID*

Officials of the Atlanta Office of the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife notified Secretary of Interior Stewart L. Udall today that U. S. Game Management Agents and State Conservation Officers made a widespread series of arrests in exposing a massive wildlife racket involving the illegal possession, transportation and sale of migratory waterfowl and resident game. Approximately 161 individuals in the States of Louisiana, Arkansas, Maryland, Virginia and North Carolina were named in Federal warrants charging them with the illegal traffic.

Forty-five (45) Federal agents from 13 Southeastern States plus Regional Supervisors L. J. Merovka, Albuquerque, New Mexico, and F. H. Davis, Minneapolis, Minnesota, together with State Conservation Officers from the five States involved took part in the mass arrests which began at dawn today.

The operation was directed by William T. Davis, Regional Supervisor of the Branch of Management and Enforcement for the Atlanta Office of the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, and Charles H. Lawrence, Assistant Chief of the Branch of Management and Enforcement for the Bureau's Washington Office. Evidence gathered over a period of approximately two and one-half years by Federal Criminal Investigator Anthony M. Stefano revealed that the individuals charged were actively engaged in hunting, killing and trapping of waterfowl and resident game for the market.

Market hunting, illegal since 1918, continues to flourish in many areas of the United States. Eighty-two (82) Federal warrants were issued in Louisiana, 52 in Arkansas, 15 in Maryland, six in Virginia, and six in North Carolina, as a result of evidence submitted to United States District Attorneys in the various judicial districts who authorized filing of complaints. United States Commissioners, by previous arrangement, were immediately available to conduct preliminary hearings.

The undercover operations conducted by the Government resulted from numerous complaints reaching the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife that market hunting was extremely prevalent and had reached serious proportions in the areas involved.

During the course of the investigation, Criminal Investigator Stefano made 223 purchases involving more than 5,000 wild ducks and geese which constituted only a small percentage of the birds actually offered for sale by the market hunters who operate during both the open and closed seasons. The waterfowl involved in these transactions were taken by various methods including trapping, night hunting, and by the use of bait. It has been determined that the market hunters had a ready market for all the birds they could take, disposing of their illegal kills to individuals, night clubs, and through other outlets.

Regional Director Walter A. Gresh, of the Bureau's Atlanta Office, stated that waterfowl are becoming scarcer and that some species are reaching an all-time low point in numbers. With the daily bag

and possession limits more difficult to obtain by the legitimate sportsmen, the kill by market hunters constitutes a most serious threat to the future of waterfowl hunting wherever such a racket exists. He further stated that the job that Mr. Stefano performed, at considerable personal sacrifice and risk, has resulted in the greatest round-up of market hunters and collaborators in the history of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. Gresh says the arrests are the most widespread for this particular offense since there have been Federal laws regulating waterfowl hunting. During the past 10 years, more than 400 individuals have been charged by the Bureau with illegal sale of migratory game birds.

Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall today made the following statement in connection with the Fish and Wildlife Service market hunting arrests:

There is a bitter truth to be found in the shocking series of cases of market hunting for waterfowl which came to light in today's mass arrests. This racket could only exist through the vicious connivance of those who purchased the waterfowl and made the whole scheme profitable. They ~~gx~~ must share equal guilt for that wanton despoilment of a vital wildlife resource. We intend to pursue and take strong action.

I should like to commend all of the enforcement agents who tracked down these game racketeers. I am proud of the role played by the employees of this Department in their apprehension.